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SUBJECT: Secretary of Homeland Security Chertoff's visit to  
Budapest, October 28-29, 2008

¶1. Summary: Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff visited Budapest October 28-29, in connection with Hungary's accession to membership in the Visa Waiver Program and to discuss security issues with Hungarian counterparts. The official program took place on October 28, 2008, with the Secretary departing Hungary early the following morning. The Secretary met with Hungarian Minister of Justice and Law Enforcement Tibor Draskovics, Minister without Portfolio Gyorgy Szilvasi, and Senior State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Marta Feksz. The Secretary also held a joint press conference with Minister Draskovics and State Secretary Feksz on the Visa Waiver Program, ESTA, and related issues. End Summary.

¶2. Secretary Chertoff visited Hungary October 28-29, 2008 following up on President Bush's October 17 White House announcement that seven new countries, including Hungary, are to join the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). While in Hungary, the Secretary officially announced November 17 as the effective date for Hungarian citizens to start traveling under the VWP. He announced further that Hungarians may begin to apply immediately online for ESTA travel authorization.

¶3. Every Hungarian interlocutor expressed their appreciation and delight that this long-sought goal was attained. Hungary sees this as an important milestone in its efforts to achieve parity and equality with other European Union countries. All Hungarian political parties supported efforts to join the VWP and voted in support of the agreements on closer security cooperation that served to make it possible.

¶4. Hungarian Minister for Justice and Law Enforcement Tibor Draskovics briefed the Secretary on the status of the legislation to enact the Preventing and Combatting Crime Agreement, which the Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom had returned to Parliament on October 20. Minister Draskovics explained that the President's concerns related, not to the Agreement with the United States, but to the underlying legislation governing the Hungarian fingerprint database. President Solyom expressed concerns that this database also contained fingerprints belonging to victims of crime and witnesses, not exclusively those of individuals suspected, indicted, or convicted of crimes.

¶5. Minister Draskovics confirmed, both in the meeting and in the later press conference, that the Government of Hungary (GOH) approved a plan to simultaneously resubmit the Agreement to Parliament along with legislation to address President Solyom's concerns regarding the underlying database, specifically, by segregating the fingerprint data so that the criminal database will only include data associated with criminals and criminal suspects. The GOH presented that legislation to Parliament on October 28, and expected to vote on it November 3. Draskovics also stated that he had met with President Solyom earlier that morning to brief him on the GOH's plans. Draskovics expressed his confidence, based upon that meeting, that President Solyom would be satisfied by the steps taken to address his concerns.

¶6. Minister Draskovics also asked Secretary Chertoff about plans to discuss implementing arrangements for the Agreement. DHS Assistant Secretary Barth advised the Minister that the USG would be following up with partner governments for all of the similar agreements in the

coming weeks and months.

¶17. At the joint press conference, Secretary Chertoff described Hungary's membership in the VWP as "sweeping away the last dust of the iron curtain." He emphasized that the United States visa policy for Hungarian citizens will now be identical as that for Western European countries such as Britain and Germany.

¶18. Post will report separately on specific issues raised in Secretary Chertoff's meetings. This cable was cleared by the DHS delegation.

Foley